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**Spring 1990**

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Cover photograph by Dennis Drenner

## **Paw Paw In Autumn**

---

One o'clock came down bright enough  
to blind the landscape as you  
stumbled across the porch  
unable to find your breath.

The air is thick with the smell  
of creosote from the telephone poles,  
which are Roman crosses running  
from here to the heart of Sulphur.

It is as good a day as any to kill  
the pig you promised us, your son's  
family. The water in the barrel is  
already a rolling boil, a rusty drum

on cinderblocks my sister and mother  
dance around to feed the fire. The sow  
is still, paw-paw approaching could be  
a dream in her head, the twenty-two

in his hand a long tuber, a root  
too deep to dig for.  
I have spent the morning raking leaves,  
mowing the lawn one last time before winter,

and all morning I have watched you  
on the porch with Wild Turkey, what  
you call a bottle of mercy. Maw-maw  
is crying in the living room, dark

behind the screen door, and you cuss  
my father down to a scuffle  
in the cramped kitchen of your mind,  
then take the swing that breaks your hand

in the wall, leaving a hole  
you could not begin to fill. A hollow-point  
in the chamber, the barrel towards the brain,  
water in your eyes.



They are ancient red, the color  
of chaos, and can see the sow  
grown tranquil in the coming on  
of oblivion.

# Coins

—Sulphur, Louisiana

---

The cush-cush tasted good then,  
sweet cornbread in a bowl of milk,  
for a boy too hollow-hungry  
to know a poor man's supper. No lights on,  
not yet, just the air-conditioner: dark, looming,  
frosted coils for guts. It lulled me  
sleep with its simple thrum.

Of what could I have dreamed then?  
The possibilities run together now: the patches  
of dead grass in the yard, charmed circles  
where nothing could grow, the trees  
slowly overcome by caterpillars.

From the window it could almost be winter:  
the trees half-gone, the clapboard houses trembling,  
no one out, the heat on the road like black ice.  
I remember the coins my grandfather scattered  
in the front yard, like bird seed, a whole pocketful.  
The copper and silver I searched for, for days.

I can still hear them fighting, my grandmother daring him  
to leave her a sixteen-year-old girl, half-retarded.  
Her name was Cricket, and my grandfather swore up and down  
he was innocent, that there was nothing between them.

In the strong, pleasant aroma of bathsoap, my grandmother  
would tuck me into bed, drawing the cool sheet to my chin,  
lovingly. Hers was a love I remember as hands—hard, yet gentle.  
Gentle to cup her face as she wept at the kitchen table,  
while outside the cow, in the new dark, was mooing.  
It'd gone on all night, the cow sleepless under the fertile stars,  
the mosquitoes so bad she could hardly breathe.

I could not've thought the heart of it through, not then.  
But it tugs at me now like the money in the yard,  
what I could not find, buried now, like a pain inside a dream  
of a gentle thing being eaten alive. Like that morning  
the crows began to gather, the cow not yet cold.

## These Days

---

The dim lamp in the far corner  
seems exhausted from its failure  
against the shadow that hangs

like a heavy eyelid over the room.  
It balds the walls of color, everything  
grey as if under cold dirty water.

Shed off our clothes, we lie raw  
on the single mattress, wary  
of each other's bodies as fighters

in a ring. You curl  
as in great pain or fear of being  
kicked. In the dimness,

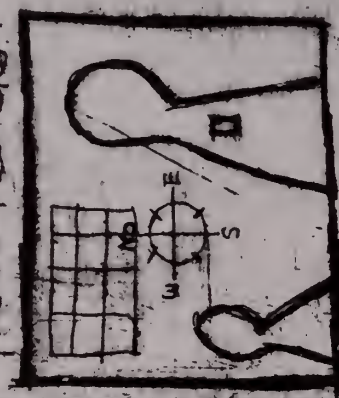
you are a stoned shadow, the only light  
from your lids snapped back:  
The balls of your white eyes bulge

in terrible blindness, you do not see  
our bed our books the laundry the clock  
the curtain, you do not see me

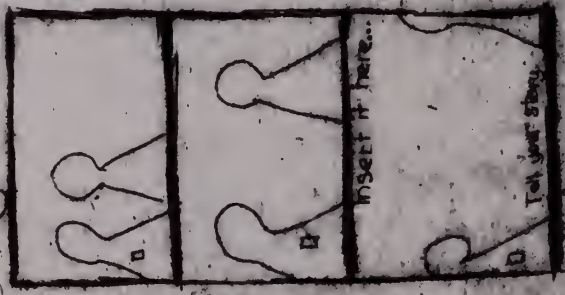
naked and hungry as a fish desperately  
bumping the roof of the water  
to break out into the blasted air

to see what it is you see.

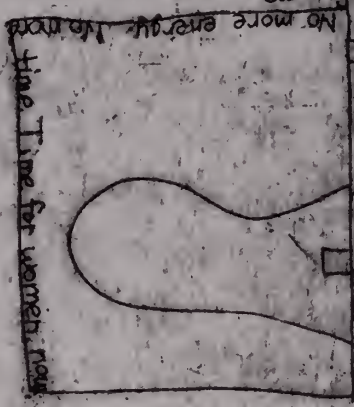
These are peoples peephholes. They are about loneliness, about female loneliness in particular. They have boxes around their hearts.



What do you see when you look but don't listen?



Everyone needs to come first at one time or another.



There's nothing in that black bag

There is a reason for that, They have no more to give.

## Lying On My Side With My Legs Tucked Slightly In

---

I fainted this morning. On the doorstep of this house. Two men rushed over to help me and some heads poked out around the corner. They brought me in and washed my face with cool water to revive me. I wasn't unconscious. Just limp. They put me down on a day bed in the living room and tried their hardest to make me comfortable.

It must have been the heat or the jetlag or something I ate last night. Or maybe it was just this place, getting mud on my shoes and collecting on the cuffs of my pants. Or the smells of car fumes and smoke. Of the animals, the bulls, the white humped bulls that wander through the middle of the street, and the ugly black pigs that burrow through heaps of garbage for food. Of the fish drying out in the sun, of the salt water from the sea. Or maybe it was just the crowds. People all around me, everywhere I go. Pressing sweaty bodies up against me on the bus, sticking their hands through the windows, begging for money or food. Staring at me, at my clothes, at my bags.

I was dying for a drink, but I didn't trust the water, and there wasn't a clean restaurant in sight. I thought I could hold out until I got back to the hotel. There'd be a cold bottle of Evian waiting for me at the desk. I'd swear they were charging me extra for it, just because I'm foreign.

It's been a while since I've seen all black or even a darkening gray. I motion to the crowd that has formed around me that I'm alright and try to get up to leave. People rush towards me from every corner, pleading that I stay. I am not to leave without more rest and a meal. I want to make it back to my room. But seeing no way to escape, I try to explain that I would at least like to freshen up before dinner. A young woman with a yellow flowered sari takes my arm and leads me to the back of the house. Passing by the kitchen entrance, I smile as my hosts look up and watch me go by.

The shower is a twenty gallon cauldron. You have to scoop warm water out of it with a small metal jug, and pour the water over yourself. The toilet is only a hole in the ground with ceramic grips for your feet.

So many bugs around. Spiders, as big as your fists, sitting up in the corner of the room. Lizards, clinging to the window like suction cups. Staring at me with wide eyes as I take my bath.

Because I am a guest, they serve me dinner with the men of the family. The mutton curry is a dark red color. After the first bite, my tongue is numb to all further sensations. I can't seem to explain to the woman server that I

cannot possibly eat as much as she keeps giving me. I eat what I can, yet it doesn't occur to me that whatever my tongue can't handle, my stomach will never accept.

Sometime during the meal, the sky has become black. My hosts beg me to stay the night. It would be foolish to leave now. After countless trips of holding my stomach and running to the back of the house, I manage to fall asleep.

I wake up with the sun rising, shining in my eyes and warming my face. My mouth is dry and I feel a sharp pain in my side. Light-headed when I try to stand.

Lying on my side with my legs tucked slightly in, I stare at the wall on the other side of the room. A couple of windows in front of me, and a door at the far end. The door is open and lets in hot air. Wooden fan on the ceiling, standing still.

I look down, along my feet. Against the wall is a little shrine. A small, rosewood structure housing an even smaller, silver statue smeared with red and yellow powder. Surrounded by offerings of fresh flowers and a coconut.

Somebody comes in the room and puts a bowl of rice in front of me. She takes two steps back to watch me eat. I don't recognize her; she wasn't here when I was brought in. I lean over from the bed and use my left arm to keep myself from falling over. Put a spoonful of the watery rice in my mouth and lift my head to thank her. Putting the spoon down, and then looking up again, I notice she has gone.

Elbow and forearm, bright pink and swollen. Making me scratch every inch of exposed skin. Swarms of mosquitoes came after me last night. I could barely lift my arm to swat them. Even sleeping with a mosquito net on the bed didn't keep them out. There'd always be just one in there with me, keeping me up during the night. Biting me through the sheets and buzzing next to my ear.

It gets so hot sometimes. And with so much dust and dirt in the air, there's no way to stay clean. No matter how much you wash. Lizards or no lizards.

Lying in bed, sometimes I hear them whisper things about me. Wonder what they are saying. Probably about how lazy I'm being. Feel faint every time I try to get up, though.

I look over at the table. Bowl of rice is still sitting there. I reach over and scoop up another mouthful. No taste to it, kind of pasty. Probably the only thing I can digest right now.

Wooden table, wooden door frame, wooden floorboards. Reminds me of Cheyenne. Just driving through. Stopped off at the best Ponderosa Steak House in the world. One inch thick layer of shellac on every one of its wooden tables. Mine had sticky rings of residue from the last customer's soda that kept rubbing off onto my elbows. Dimly lit room. Only light from candles sitting in red artichoke-shaped candle holders. Stared at the flicker-



ing flame and swirled the melted wax around until my food came. Had the thickest, juiciest steak ever. Can't remember what else I had. Just the steak. Cooked perfectly too. Just the way I like it. Wasn't raw at all. Makes me ill to cut into food and see red. Even pink.

Then there was that place in Amarillo. The Chinese-American Cuisine place. Had the nastiest food I've ever eaten. Think I ordered veal parmesan. Wonder how that got on the menu. Little diner, took a booth across from the counter. Sunlight streaming through the window, reflected off of the napkin dispenser into my eyes. Had to squint all through lunch. Must have made it up to a hundred and ten degrees that day. Car overheated twice.

Ate another mouthful of rice. Don't know where they found me a spoon. Nobody seems to use them, except for cooking.

I'm sweating all over. My neck and between my shoulder blades. Can't keep my head up long enough to get the spoon over from the bowl to my mouth.

Someone brings me another pillow, then leaves just as quickly. Easier to keep my head up, but uncomfortable as hell.

Would kill for some ice cream right now, or anything cold. If I had the strength and if it wouldn't go straight through me. Strawberry flavored, with real chunks of fruit. Double scoop in a sugar cone. Not the soft kind with fake flavoring that gets squeezed out of a machine at Dairy Queen. Real strawberry ice cream that's smooth and creamy and that lingers in your mouth for a moment, flattened between the roof of your mouth and your tongue, before it glides effortlessly down your throat. Real strawberry ice cream like they had at that little restaurant that had the golden steer painted on the window.

The smell of rice is making me nauseous. Thinking about food isn't helping much either. I close my eyes and lay my head back. Pillows strain my neck, but I'm too tired to move one out of the way. Trying to keep awake but the bags of skin under my eyes suddenly feel very heavy. I try to lift my eyelids, but they weigh too much. Feel like my cheeks are at my chin, pulled down by the mass of my jaw.

I awake sometime later. Don't know how long I've slept. My shirt is soaked and my chest feels clammy. Ceiling fan is spinning slowly and is making a soft humming noise. Nets around the bed are swaying with the hot breeze from the fan. The bowl of rice has been taken away and the wooden table cleared off. I smell the smoke of burning wood mixed with the spices of supper, and I hear my stomach groan. The pain is gone and I don't feel so weak. Thinking it might be nice to find a nice restaurant in town.

## Media

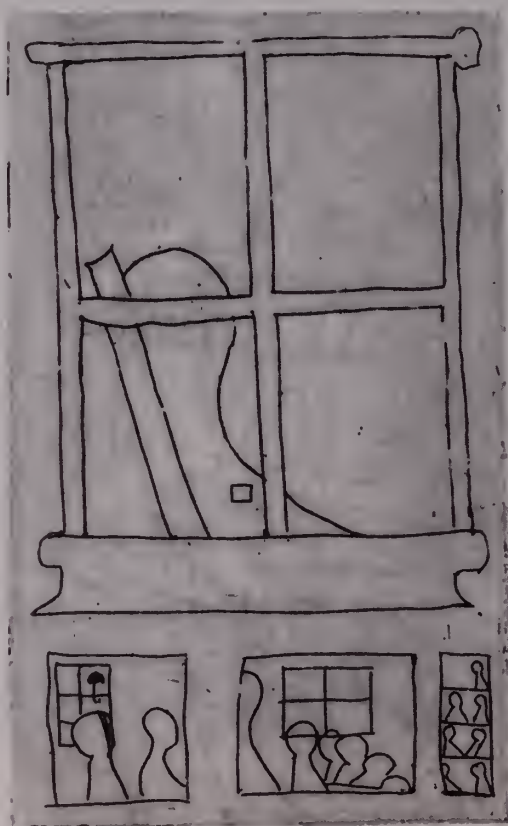
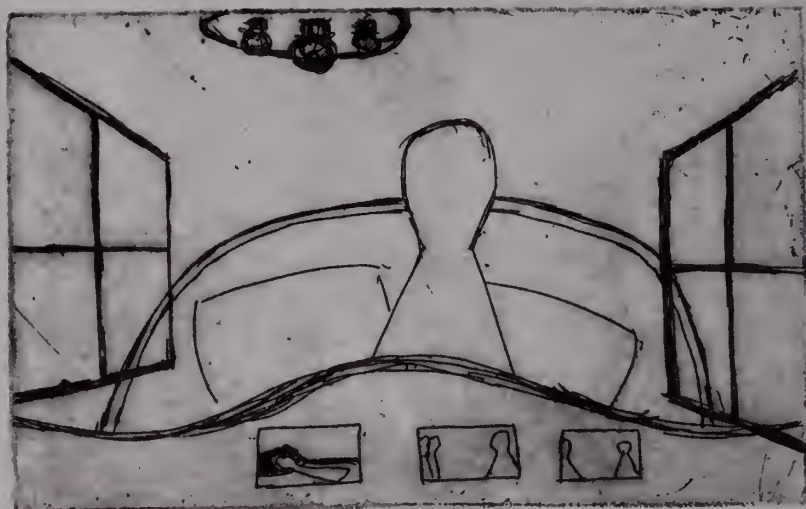
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My mother was an artist—  
A natural-born curse.  
She was an easel  
Which upheld the blessing,  
A palette  
Of colours, for mind and body,  
Painted slowly for months;  
Then a case  
To cater for my shaping, and  
There I was showed off;  
A sculptor, she had to  
Make me for this world  
Without over-sized hands,  
And from more than clay;  
Resigned to curator,  
I made a display  
In our domestic museum;  
The "Brooding Circle"  
Ogled cutie in his blue.

But now her acquisition fades,  
Whose work am I now?  
And what was my father?  
A canvas  
And the colour white.







Kathy Clarke

## Other Sorrows

---

It was Joanna's and my first place since we began living together. Her uncle found it for us. It was situated about ten miles north of Tarrytown, a small, tumbling addition to a house set back in a nook of forest with a park down the street that opened out onto the Hudson River.

The apartment had huge, beautiful picture windows, but was drafty, especially being so close to the river. The windows faced west and opened out onto a hillside of trees, mostly sycamore and oak, bare now for December. At dusk, the sky would fire out red, then the sun would fall into the sad tangle of branching.

The first night there, on the mattress we laid in a corner of the living room, Joanna cried. I woke not to the sound of her crying, but the feel of her tears on my back and shoulder. Her tears were lukewarm.

I'd seen too much water that day. The tiny raindrops that'd rained all that day as we loaded her mother's station wagon. The room was very dark, a thick, granular dark, no moon, only a streetlamp burning, the wind up a little through the trees. She sobbed quietly, not wanting to wake me, but also not wanting to be away from me.

Without saying anything, I held her close to me, tightly.

"God, you're so warm. How do you stay so warm?" she said.

"Let me get you another blanket," I said, then started to get up.

"No, don't get up, just hold me. You're so warm, like a furnace."

"I wish I could hold you all night like this," I said.

"Like the horses fall asleep standing up, you could fall asleep holding me."

"Don't I wish. God, you feel so good," I said.

"No, you feel good."

"Are you beginning to feel like we did the best thing?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. I like it here with you, but I still feel sort of lonely. I can imagine how that must make you feel, but I promise it's not you. It's not that I feel alone. I can't put a finger on it, I just feel lonely."

"Wait until the morning, things will be different. Once you see the apartment in a good light, you'll feel much better. I'll put on some coffee, and we'll go find a good bakery and get donuts and bread and some sandwich meat, and stuff to make a salad. We'll eat here, or have a picnic at that park, if you want. Tomorrow is your day, anything you want."

"Oh, you're being so sweet. Thank you."

"Joanna, that's nice of you to say."

If she had known the guilt I carried that day, for being mean and bullish during such a delicate, emotionally-charged episode in her life. I had pushed her unrelentingly to finish packing, to box everything tightly, and in my determination, was unwilling to indulge her sorrow, and unable really to comfort her.

In her confusion, my thoughtlessness had been overlooked, or sublimated. The mind can only tolerate so much chaos.

The boxes were piled up in the bedroom, in the kitchen, none of them opened. We hadn't finished moving until sometime after ten that night, having made two trips, and had only enough energy to shower and fix up something to sleep on.

By the second trip it was dark and Joanna's mother asked us to stay over for the night, but I did not think that would be a good idea.

I said it was important that we finish moving, not draw it out any longer, that we would sleep at *our* new apartment. She was neutral about the whole thing, but agreed with me that we should get the moving over with.

I remembered how Joanna had cried when we pulled away from the driveway, waving good-bye, the wagon loaded. She cried from Columbia County to Putnum County, while I drove, the limit at first, then pushed a good seventy down the Taconic State Parkway.

"Robert?"

"What?"

"Are you lonely, now? Do you ever feel lonely?"

"Of course I do. It's unavoidable sometimes. Now, it's a feeling of disorientation, something strange and mysterious, but I don't mind it too much. It's like I want to go further into it, to see what it's about."

"Doesn't it scare you? I remember in Rochester, there was a small lake, more like a pond, near our house. The lake didn't belong to us, so my father would take my brother and I out at night, in the little rowboat. Even in the summer it was chilly. I think I was about six. I'd have to hold my brother in my lap while my father dragged the boat to the water. His feet would plop in the water and he'd go out to his knees before getting in. The water was black. Sometimes, there'd be stars, like powdered sugar, and they'd shine off the water. It was scary.

"I was fine as long as we were close to the bank, but I got scared once we got out of reach of the dock. I held my brother like a buoy. He was warm, like you. He didn't make a sound. I felt very insignificant, like the universe was so large and profound that my life didn't matter, like no one's life mattered. I kept thinking the boat would sink, or a huge shark or whale would swallow us, or something," she said dismissively, smiling as though that fear no longer applied, as though it were a ridiculous fear that she had dispelled long ago.

Her father had died about four years before, leaving a gaping hole in the emotional stability of immediate survivors, to where they could no longer walk or eat or breathe in the house which he practically built, so that they

sold the house in Rochester at a huge loss, and moved to Claverack.

"Did you tell your father you were afraid?"

"I think he knew without me having to say anything. He'd show me the stars, trying to teach me their names. I only remember one — Orion, the warrior with the shield, three bright stars for a belt."

"He was your protector, Orion?"

"Yes," she said. "My father said he'd always be there for me." She stopped abruptly, aware of the ambiguity of what she'd said, that both were true, but one was a promise that hadn't been kept. The room, as I said, was dark, but I could almost feel her mood submerge, as though confirming her childhood fear of a rowboat going down in a small, darkwater lake.

"Where is Orion?" I asked, unsure about the direction of the question, whether this night would fall into the growing pile of missed opportunities.

"In the south. You look for the three stars, his belt. They are evenly spaced and very bright. Once you have that, you can see his shield, his head, then his legs."

"You'll have to show me on a clear night."

"I promise," she said.

A propellered airplane passed slowly just under the clouds, the resonant thrum of the engines and the frail white and green lights somehow inept to address such darkness. To me, it brought the image of a starling, the effrontery of starling.

"We've just embarked; it's too early to be lost."

"But too far from land to be called to," she said.

We held each other some more. She wore a pair of long-johns and a tee-shirt, and felt warm to me. Where was she cold? I wondered, wishing I could get to where she was cold.

I pressed my hips against her, and could feel the blood rush. She gave me a look, her eyes wet, as though suddenly focused. I'm sure she felt it. She rolled onto her back, and kissed my neck, her legs spreading out under me.

After a warm silence, the floorboards began to creak. A Greek family — the Economopolises, judging from the mailbox — lived in the main part of the house, and one of them was up, apparently the heaviest.

We heard a door shut, then, with considerable agitation and horror, heard the unmistakable sound of a toilet lid being pulled back and a robust stream of urine pouring into the bowl. The poor man must've been at it a full minute before pushing out the last few, feeble strains.

The hardwood floors groaned as he lumbered back to bed, and Joanna and I traded looks, astonished; the man had neither flushed nor washed his hands.

"For a minute I thought he was going to shrivel up," I said, to thwart Joanna's obvious annoyance.

"That or flood the whole house," she said. "And don't bother to shake his hand if you meet him."



"Oh I won't, but what if he offers it?"

"If he offers it, just walk away," she said.

"Sure, that'd be right neighborly, wouldn't it," I said.

"Neighborly? Obviously this man is anti-social. I mean, look at the facts: he lives way out here in the middle of nowhere, and he doesn't wash his hands after he goes to the bathroom."

"Good heavens, you're right. Definitely signs of an abrasive, anti-social unit. Why, judging merely from the sound of his footsteps, I'd go so far as to say he is mildly psychotic."

"Yes, I agree with your prognosis, doctor. Most astute, as always. I think we should operate immediately."

"Nurse, the twelve-gauge," I said, my voice raised, snapping my fingers to an imaginary nurse.

"Oh, that's morbid," Joanna said.

"You're right. Nurse, the twenty-two."

"Jesus, Robert, what makes you think you have to shoot him? You're supposed to talk to him — you know, 'Hello, tell me about your mother.' "

"But that would involve risk; I might have to shake his unwashed hand."

Joanna pretended to consider such a messy possibility.

"Alright then, let's shoot him, but be nice about it."

"Yes, we wouldn't want to upset him, might irritate his condition."

In the dark, I cocked the gun and aimed at the wall, and *pdow*, treated his condition.

The wind was blowing, a cold hiss through the thin branching of trees. The wind in the trees sounded pleasantly of rain.

The room was dark. The radiator made a pathetic clicking noise. I could feel where her tears had dried on my shoulder.

Joanna was eighteen-years-old at the time, I, about twenty-one. So young, so full of dreams. Paper dreams under a thin moon. Jesus, have mercy.

I remember that day vividly, the boxes of clothes, kitchen stuff, odd sticks of furniture and a brown wicker basket of dried flowers atop it all.

Joanna's mother, Loretta, let us use the station wagon. In it, we fit everything we needed: must stuff, basically just books, some dishes, a typewriter and a coffeemaker, the kind that sits and boils away on the stove.

Rain fell that day, as one might expect on a somber occasion. Water beaded on the windows, running down like tears.

God, I would've given \$100 for a sunny day, with Joanna's mother expressing pleasantries, not the muted indignation I received.

Although Loretta helped with the packing, as a matter of course, her position was apparent: *You are stealing my only daughter from me.* Joanna's mother had these pale blue eyes which were very expressive, and, at the same time, very sensitive and vulnerable.

Her husband, Joanna's father, had died four years before, and the pain seemed to have never left her face.

She was sweet, as far as that goes, but with a dangerous insecurity that caused her to lash out at others when something irritated her from within herself, and afterwards she'd apologize profusely, or cry.

She had a thick, healthy German build that Gertrude Stein would've adored. I didn't think the weight bothered her until Joanna told me that she kept trying to lose it, with sporadic success, and was always seeking doctors. Joanna said her mother hated being fat.

In any case, Joanna and she did not get along. Joanna seemed not to want to claim her, but instead relished her father, who, as I've said, was dead. He went into a diabetic coma, due to negligence, and died in a hospital days later.

He was, I think, forty — very young. Joanna praised him, praised his art, his lifestyle, his wealthy family. Her loyalties were obvious, and doubtless to her mother's chagrin; though I think her mother figured everything would smooth out eventually.

The sun would have meant so much. We would have taken it as a sign of good things to come, that we were making a good decision. But the rain drove in any inkling of doubt, any sense of loss, that sad day I took Joanna away from her family, her mother. I was taking her away to live with me in New York City, our dream city, full of possibilities.

By morning, the apartment was filled with a pleasant yellow light, a bright square of sunlight on the floor.

I fixed some coffee and served it in bowls, the only containers readily available. Joanna sat up.

"I'm sorry for last night," she said.

"You don't have to apologize. I can understand the past couple days have been hard on you."

"I feel like we're doing the right thing. I mean, I feel better about all this."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that."

Later that morning, I looked for some wood. I wanted to set up a desk in front of the huge picture window. The window was in the living room.

I saw some lumber leaning against the house. There was a long, broad plank of pinboard, some one-by-fours that'd been used to make a fence.

The wood was slightly warped, damp, and smelled musty. Scrap, no doubt. Good enough. I didn't bother to ask who owned it.

I remember thinking: it's very simple, just start nailing the pieces together.



*Steven M. Dugger*



## Well

---

The darkest urge  
to crush your plant  
    beneath the window sash  
its spine  
the snake  
    plant sprawled  
on plaster crumbs  
vengeance served up—  
it crawls on its belly  
    across my plate

## Unlike Apples

---

The apple has a seed,  
a core,  
at the center of its being  
from which apple trees grow.

Men have trouble bearing fruit;  
their sperm are not poetic.  
Too many die,  
even for the poet,

and it seems the wrong ones get through:  
Our sons running around with shiny knives  
stabbing at blind things in the dark.

What I want is a seed  
at the center of my heart  
so when I peel and slice myself away  
it is there  
growing things from the dark.



*Leslie Holt*

## Rhode Island Avenue Station — Summer Fantasia

---

All of this was written  
in the summer.  
Other seasons rise to glory  
in my mind, but only  
with the help of memory.  
Summer in Washington, though,  
    is a blitzkrieg,  
    a symphony of delirious dreams,  
    sufficient,  
    expansive,  
    unqualified,  
    loosening.  
The pores of my soul yawn open in  
    Washington summers.  
Dogs run.  
Roaches run.  
Showers run.  
Stock cars run in Waldorf where  
I went once in my dreams with Tuck,  
drunken and laughing like we did  
    in the day-to-day,  
smuggling in cases of Black Label  
and chicken,  
I was aghast at his high-low banter  
    his retiring comatose demeanor  
    but underneath and on the edges  
    an ear tuned for danger  
    and a taught eye for sexual chance.

Hostages to petty cash  
blanched-out  
frazzle-haired  
would-be yuppie women  
wheezing in a heavy  
synthetic blend skirt  
make-up eaten away and  
    flushed down her back  
    by the sweat  
she's moving roughly  
with growing frenzy  
from person to person  
in the Metro toll plaza  
moving between frowning  
blacks and potbellied  
whitemen with tootight  
pants, zippers popped-  
    out and straining to  
    hold back the gluttony  
anyway here she is in the  
station gantry ready  
    to shoot up to the  
    platform  
but she's stuck with a  
\$10 bill (I've done *this*  
stupid shit myself . . .)  
but who has change for a  
\$10 bill? I can't recall  
the last time I had \$10  
in my pocket — these days  
I'm glad to reach down  
there and find enough  
small change to make it  
to the next stop  
on the Red Line

Did he think twice about my beer?  
My money? My car?  
Was it straight barter — my wheels  
for his years?

Rhode Island Avenue  
Station  
mapped-out  
smoothed-over  
perched-atop  
the scarred-up black-  
veined railyards  
From the south end of the  
platform the tracks fan  
out into a hideous brown  
and blue delta where the  
trains fade into Union  
Station  
where they breathe out  
hissing  
and the human cargo  
empties into  
lockstep lines  
along the railtracks  
along the escalators  
along the runways  
on the other side  
into the plaza of 53  
flags  
a senseless mingling  
a coming/going stream  
made winning  
and elegant  
and profitable  
in the upstairs glitz  
but from the south end  
of the platform at  
Rhode Island Avenue  
Station  
you have a different view  
of things

What sound is it I hear  
whispering up from the tracks  
a ringing rusty sawing moan  
while the plastic and metal

Disneyland train  
is still a mile up the line?  
Is it the souls of dislocated blacks  
proud Civil War veterans  
painters and masons from North

Carolina — knowing of hammers  
and pistols — protectors  
heavy church women, storefront men  
who built LeDroit Park?

Shades, too, of young style council  
men and women  
who filled the rows  
of Howard and Lincoln Theatres?  
Bones removed, do their spirits linger here?

Rhode Island Avenue  
Station  
mapped-out  
smoothed-over  
perched-atop  
Columbia Harmony  
Cemetery  
the graves now moved  
the old bones carted off  
to some suburban nowhere

Above the Kiss'n'Ride  
blacktop parking lot  
hemmed-in choked-off  
city-bound clover  
rises on a landfill  
to the east  
tinting the green smog  
purple

# Elegy

---

This is to remember James Baldwin, the black Jeremiah,  
who seethed and toiled in the wretched fields  
of Harlem and Montparnasse and his own firey mind,  
who drank and drank from the vat of our festering crimes  
and held down this volatile brew  
while it curdled inside and brought on convulsions  
but man! what lucid retching! what pristine rants!  
Like a geyser of outrage he spewed it all out  
and mixed in the ink were his blood and bile,  
condensed and running through rivulet interviews,  
torrential novels,  
essays like ornate marble fountains showering  
the nearly unseen mist of a white-lipped nightmare  
hanging in the air, dampening your skin.  
Each time I enter his still-rushing stream,  
the splash and commotion send drops flying everywhere  
that water my own flowers of ecstasy and hate.

## I Am Still Naked

---

The refrigerator was that used-white colour with those rounded edges and a small silver handle, and a black smudge near the bottom from the move. There was one magnet — round, white, and plastic with a drawing of a horse and carriage from Intercourse, Pennsylvania — which held a picture of him to the center of the door. His hair was longer then, and he still had that look in his eyes — that look that I don't think I ever really understood — that look of: "help me" — that melancholic face he had perfected so well. That picture was taken shortly fter I had bought the refrigerator. Those two things — the picture and the refrigerator are the only two things left from my youth.

No longer having anything else from my youth, I moved here: this aging two-bedroom apartment — finally to New York City — the big city — where all the excitement is — where I always thought I'd move in my youth — where I can slouch on this stool in the corner of this kitchen, next to this window. I forced it open a few months ago and have not been able to shut it since. With all this snow and wind, I've wanted to so desperately but I can't seem to do it. Too much of that teal paint, I suspect. I'm always picking up chips of that paint when I'm not on this stool.

But I like the view — it's of that alley next to that oriental restaurant — the one around the corner on 3rd — so, I haven't closed it yet. I watch the cooks drag that unused food next to the bin, left in those snow-covered, green bags. I love to watch. Frozen plastic bags. I watch everyone who walks in that alley.

"I'm sorry. I'd offer you a place to sit — but, as you can see, there is no other than this stool . . . and, well . . ."

The last time I saw him was earlier that year in February. It was cold then, too, if I remember correctly. He had been mumbling about how much he hated Valentine's Day and how he didn't do anything for it. I remember I didn't believe him and I was on a stool much the same way I am today and, well, I didn't believe him. Not at all, really. Well, what would you have done? What do you do when someone — that someone who you care for and lies to you but you accept anyway — gives you his heart? Well, that was just after I bought this refrigerator here but what can you do with someone's heart?



I still remember the delivery boy. He was young and cute — that clean-I'm-just-sixteen face with a crew cut. Said his name was Christopher. He had the most gorgeous brown eyes. I invited him in and offered him some lemonade. We sat on the floor because I never did buy any chairs. And, well, that's when he gave me the package. The delivery.

From him. After he cut his hair — he must have shortly after I saw him. It was a shock, really. It looked so — final. Well, I know because I . . . well, I had to identify him. His body. His face, really. And, well, it's in the refrigerator. Wrapped in the aluminum foil. It's rather gotten to stinking lately, but I didn't know what else to do with it. You can't really give it away, can you? I don't have the strength to throw it out. Oh, but I never open that refrigerator anymore. Just park my bones on this stool like this for most of the day. Or on the toilet sometimes. And look at that refrigerator. Had to keep it there. That's where it'd keep. Well, what do you do when someone gives you his heart?

"Well, at least it stopped snowing. Yes, it stopped . . . and I was just getting used to it."



*Viviane Moritz*



## This is What Happened One Sunday Afternoon

---

He came out of the shower wearing only a towel.  
I thought it unusual  
But not too  
Unusual.  
Some men are not shy.

No, it was definitely unusual  
to be trapped like an animal,  
wild eyes looking for a way out.  
I thought "I have to get away from him."

And before I knew it  
I had acquired the strength  
to throw his body  
off of my body  
and onto the floor  
against the wall.

I was stunned.

That's what they call a rush of adrenaline.  
You hear about it.  
You count on it.  
But it only gets you so far.  
It only got me as far as the locked door.

He said it sincerely:  
"I don't want to hurt you."  
I don't want you to hurt me.  
Put the knife down —  
It makes me nervous  
You make me nervous  
This makes me nervous

I remembered that I should search, desperately,  
For something to spray in his face.

I thought there might be perfume  
on that shelf by the sink.

The first thing that came to my mind  
was perfume.

Perfume.

Can you imagine?

But there was no perfume.

And anyway there was no courage.

He let me scream for help —

I don't think he even heard me.

But next door and next door and down the hall

I know you heard me.

Maybe if you don't think about me

I'll go away.

## Self Portrait in Green

---

"Hello, my name is Joyce," I said to the entering figure. He walked in like he's done this before, and, with a smile and casual lean into the couch, he made himself a painting.

Unfortunately, the room lacked lighting fixtures. The curtains were drawn; this was to keep out the high beams racing by on the boulevard. Perhaps the lamp in the den — that would give me shadow. For in a composition like this the placement of light is everything: the angles, the texture breathes either wrong, or right with the light. The strength of illumination is important too, and the color, white or yellow. His skin is pale, I'll get the yellow.

"Now don't be shy." He wasn't, but I always said that. Ritual in other aspects of my life kept my painting new. As usual my subject wasn't too nervous; actually this one was rather open about his body and sex. It was me that was nervous, and excited.

I've loved the body as art for a long time, starting back in the eighth grade. My breasts began to grow, and I was shy, and I always wore more clothing than I really needed, just to keep myself to myself. I couldn't really believe in them; my sister always said: "Now you know, since I'm first I've got more of Mom's in me, I'll be bigger than you." Well, she was sooner of course, but I was eventually bigger. But the speed of it all . . . it was strange, it being so fast that I just had to keep track of it. That's why every month or so I'd undress by the window during the sunrise and re-create my visage in the closet mirror. I explored using different colors and brush strokes; the one of me in green from a side angle is my favorite. Not my sister's though; she found my nudes one day resting in what I thought was a safe place under the bed. She threatened to tell our mom, and eventually even wanted me to paint her. So of course I read her diary and switched my attention to boys.

"How do ya want me to pose?" he asked.

"What's your name, it matters to me."

"Oh sorry, I'm Leonard, glad to meet ya."

"Well Leonard, I think I'd like your stomach in this one. It's not too flabby but will still give me some contour."

He touched his belly with a slight stroke of his hand. That was a normal gesture with men; funny as it seems they are often more concerned with their stomachs than their privates, but do hardly anything about it.

We placed pillows under his back and he laid with his torso bent, navel to the ceiling with a slight tilt towards me, so as to get a little gravity on his flesh. I wasn't sure about the couch and pillows though; maybe I'd make

him doing an impossible back flip into a pool.

I didn't keep with actual flesh tones with this one; Leonard gave me a Venus motif as if he were made of pure marble. The only change I made were darker colors for his hair; instead of brown dominance, I thought black was more of a contrast. White skin, black hair. I knew this was an old favorite of nudes around this school, but I haven't ever done one.

After the hour was over he tilted off of the couch and bent forward almost touching the floor. Perhaps being bowed for an hour calls for fixing. He then walked with his back leaning towards me to his towel, as if he were shy.

"Joyce, I know this may seem strange . . ."

"Oh don't be shy. If you don't want anyone to see this . . . just my teacher, okay?"

"Well yeah, just your teacher. But I was wondering if you . . . if I could . . ."

He suddenly looked down and I felt really awful about this. In a way I always felt as if I were stealing from them, like the bushmen in Australia. You take their picture, you steal their soul, that kind of thing. The boys always left here feeling a little bit humbled, except for the ego trips who left feeling like they just had sex with me. I usually painted those guys in my cubist style.

"I would like to paint too," he said with a blush.

"Well sure, are you an art student?" I said, knowing that he wasn't. Maybe he was going to ask me to meet with him to give it a try; maybe he liked me and this was a line he's tried with the other girls.

"Well you just painted me, and that means I just have to paint you. I'm sick of doing the usual plants. You moved so slowly and gracefully all that time I couldn't believe it! You're like my favorite tree when I was young . . ." I was strangely flattered.

After an hour of observing and exploring every inch of a complete stranger's nudity glowing to me, I finally realized that I was being observed too. Was I really like a tree? Did my arms harden and crack into bark, my finger nails sprout out blossoms? Did my hair rustle in the heat duct air? I never could forget that painting of myself, green and contorted, a painting I wanted no one to see.

I gave a little laugh and asked him to breakfast. It was just about eight thirty and I was hungry.





*Rina Kundu*



## Three Facets

---

I'm painting the cracks in the pavement,  
Meticulously, in egg yolk.  
Yesterday I braided pampas grass,  
bluely in the arboretum.  
And one day I hope to  
bear cunt pink children.

Once,  
Jammed by traffic,  
in mid-crossing,  
an orange-faced woman joined me.  
Red light and white WALK  
and I slipped down  
into a yolky crack  
where there was a lady,  
blue-rinsed, wearing a brown,  
yellow-flowery pinafore  
that was wilting,  
like her face.

## Procession

---

1.

We float  
like over-used words  
that hang, unwanted, in the air.

2.

Sshhh-Khaaa. Sshhh-Khaaa.  
Pushing air into stubborn lungs,  
heart now  
tired, indifferent—even though  
we sweet-talk and coo  
as if to an infant.  
Father  
became an infant  
curled and uncurled shrunken fists,  
his eyes rolled behind closed lids,  
arms, legs twitched  
as if dreaming.  
Only not dreaming.  
Throat bulges with  
the respirator tube,  
blue,  
he shimmies as if on a conveyor belt.  
I stand by touching cold limp hands  
talking nonsense  
in case he can hear.

3.

The air is  
dense with imminent rain  
gnats are swarming  
priest is too loud.  
I stare into the moist pit.  
During Psalm 23  
the casket straps bleat—  
but hold.

4.

Loose dirt  
ants spiders gnats on  
wilting flowers.  
Walking away my  
footsteps on the gravel path  
louder than cemetery birds.

5.

Today I looked at my wrist  
twelve times, though my watch was forgotten.  
The way a child's tongue  
searches the hole  
where a tooth had once been.



*Dennis Drenner*



## Fatherdaughter

---

This is the me you don't  
know: like Dandelion Wine sweet  
and common, that lingers  
only to the one who  
made it, or one who sips it  
slowly,  
letting it simmer in  
the mouth.

Now you work out  
this world reality at  
computer keys  
that make no  
sound.

Your hands remember  
grease and sanding  
wood, holding babies,  
like me,  
when they cry, hammer  
bruise thumb nails,  
snow cold skin cracks,  
guitar strings.

Your bass low notes  
tumble into my  
ear and settle in easy  
sustain.

Your laugh like D.C.  
summer steam  
rises into your Bing Crosby  
eyes that shine blue  
always, even when your eyelids hang  
heavy from long  
commutes, executive work,  
and gin.

# I Spin Dry: A Laundromat Poem

---

Dandelions when they dry,  
old-woman-white hair  
blowing away  
from easy kid breath  
of real wind.

Like kids playing Red Rover  
throwing each other  
to walls of arms  
back and forth. It's in  
their laughs.

It's mom's perfume  
when I was five  
that leaped ahead and followed  
behind like her jewelry—  
glitter and slick hose

And Frosted Flakes when  
they fall into a ceramic  
bowl and the milk  
splashes; they all struggle  
to float to the top.



## Phoenix Laundromat

---

"O let there be nothing in  
the world but laundry."

— Richard Wilbur

At first it's just what you see in any laundromat dryer  
that sets you off. Watch number 9. It swirls  
like silk-scarf bird-flocks weaving the wind,  
shaking bobbins and shuttles of light. Parrot  
greens, purple swatches of martin, tattered  
gull-clouds stitched with blue jay and dartings of finch.

These flights can be haunted off by a sheet  
of white which then lifts off like snow going up  
and back to its dark when everything tumbles  
forward again, flying almost out of the loom  
head over dells and hill over bells.

The young woman whose wash I am taking in  
is reading *Glamour*. She does candlelight suppers.  
The linens say felicity, say grace.  
She will not mind my reading her life, but even so  
I do it by glances. At the flash of a black bra  
or a peach negligee, I look down at my shoes.

Or else at dryer 10. Catch how it clenches  
serious work clothes pummeled black and blue.  
He is bulge and hemp, as homespun as the name  
hammered onto the pockets: Duke. Nothing whispers  
here, not even towels. They're beige as mortar.  
I look for a leap of frivolous stripes  
or rings, for light green as slight as a child  
or a wink of whistling yellow. I search  
for some wildly emblazoned sweatshirt reminder  
of a crazy week in Ocean City with too much beer.  
The only relief is the red shout of a hunter's sleeve.

I study number 8 the way an ophthalmologist  
looks down an eye. Its round glass door  
is a lens: vitreous laundry searchlighting out.  
Back down the flutter of semaphor flags  
that blur lightly to blue, there is this optic nerve,  
this cave, and I curve in just enough light to see  
paintings of fox and fish on the walls. Then, stars —  
pulses under skin that make little fists  
in the drumskin sky. Number 8 is my own.  
My colorspecks merge. But don't be deceived by this cool  
expression of blue. My mind's eye is red.

9 and 10 went home long ago. The streetlights compete  
with the beating stars. Only dryer 4 fixes me now,  
and she has not come. I imagine her off at the market  
filling a basket with fruit, everything round. I want her  
to be black, be ripe-olive black, and I want to walk  
a steamy, twisted path through lemongrass, easing my basket down  
to the river, down to the river, and to find her  
there in sunlight, out on the rocks, and now we are both  
silent villagers waving a far hello out on the river,  
pounding, pounding purple clothes on rocks.

## Nightlight

---

Whether she knows our fears or wants  
only to hear us behave,  
she leaves the door open,  
lets the hall-light file into the room

where it stripes across sheets  
and widens on the far wall.  
I kick my feet awhile  
to test the stint of light, watch it

reel around my ankle  
into his hands across the canyon  
of space between our beds  
that we're careful not to bump.

He palms and fingers it—feathered birds  
form in the shadows, crocodiles  
beneath them, all hushed  
and resolving themselves into signs

of restlessness. Until we give up  
on the walls, hop from bed to bed and turn  
to the stars and the backyard  
curtained with light from the basement,

going on like this until  
again she comes up to suggest  
we give in to our fatigue.  
What fatigue? Sometimes those nights

casting off I could feel  
the earth's rotation, the sudden turning  
of the room loosening  
on its axis,

the light now bent over backwards  
and heaving itself to the floor,  
shrugging off all familiar ties  
as it traveled over

the first intimations of a lifetime  
and landed upright in a rippled face  
squinting into the hallway  
late-night, wanting water.

## A Laundromat Poem, In Reply To Rod Jellema

---

This is no ordinary laundromat—not like the one you imagined open to the public, bright with the slang of neon and a panel of steamed-up windows filtering streetlight. Rather—a dormitory basement, utilitarian at best, too far from beaten rocks and riverbanks to come under much unaccustomed notice. A room tucked away, punctured only with steel pipes insulated and running from ceiling to floor and along the walls like segments of exposed anatomy—after the muscle, pulled back like a curtain, it's all bone and bundles of nerve.

It goes undisturbed most of the weekday outside the scheduled visit of a janitor. Come evening, though, and these machines fill and empty, again and again, as sure as lungs, the room now warm and humid. Lined up like sugarcubes, the dryers verge on dissolving in the developing sauna.

The washers, they are building blocks too large for a child. Jacks-in-the-box set to go off, already sprung. Two of them, lids up and flush along the far wall, are a pair of snake-eyes, come up lucky again. At the bottom of one is a dime as bright as a moon.

Here, to pry into clothes means opening doors and lids, watching the armfuls shoved down hungry mouths. One girl in the corner is careful to separate the darks from the whites, mumbling to herself as she goes. You would take your chances, sort all your load into one hot wash and cool rinse, hope for the best. You don't mind colors bleeding: your whites are all pinks and lavenders streaked like the sky at sundown. And your blue jeans—the new pair, pulled up dark and wet—come out bleached with the first stars this evening.



*Leslie Bauer*

## The Scene

(Excerpt from a Play)

---

### *Dramatis Personae*

**Everywoman** — medium build, dark straight hair cut in a bob. Pale, pale skin, large earrings — hooped or something, dark eyes emphasized with eye liner, lipstick. White T-shirt, oversized men's summer jacket — strange forest green/black subtle plaid — rolled-up sleeves and then pushed up almost to her elbows. Faded blue jeans, 501's tapered to the ankles, small black cowboy boots, thick black leather belt. Has on a few rings and a man's watch but no other ornaments. (Everywoman resembles Noh (the twin sister?) )

**Bill (Leonato)** — Withdrawn, rigid, bookish. He has no sense of style or flair. Delicate features, could almost be beautiful but for his aura of self-torture.

**Pete (Don Pedro)** — Dark, large build, almost gangly. Dresses in oversized clothing of strange colors (e.g. mustard yellow) — oversized baggy shorts or pants with a gray-green pullover sweater. Hair dark, short. Robust, almost reminiscent of Hemingway in that he wants to be perceived as a manly man.

**Gayle (Claudio)** — Pretty, or attractive in a pretty way: scrubbed, clean look. Faded soft clothing.

**Angela (Beatrice)** — Very put together looking but not blah-blah boring — off the racks stylish — definite flair if undiscovered. Extremely sensible, practical and confident.

**Guy (Don John)** — Skulky. Wears Levi's and a sport jersey, "Sex Wax" or Beastie Boys, something with offensive, sexual connotations. Silent for the most part. Deep voice.

**Mieda (Hero)** — Wears nondescript pastel clothes. Tentative style indicative of a fluctuating self-image.

**Miguel (Benedick)** — Tall, slender man. Beautiful, long movements. Very attractive, sexy, a little scary-looking. Wears black clothing mostly. Long, dark, wavy hair. Black jeans, combat boots.



**Professor Wright** — Tweedy suit, blah-blah tie and shoes. Stiff, physical carriage. He wears half glasses so that he looks down over his nose while sticking his chin out a bit (this is a habit). He has many physical/verbal, obviously habitual movements which he is totally unaware of.

**Noh** — Small build. I envision her wearing longish, fashionable, strange, black clothes. All contrast, dramatic.

*[The time is the present — that is to say 1989 or the early 1990's. The play takes place during the course of one afternoon in a college of some sort, somewhere. I imagine a University of moderate size on the east coast. It is not necessary, indeed, perhaps not even preferable that the cast be all white. The Stage is divided into two parts; Stage left is "The Classroom." It is a moderately-sized room with abstract architectural murals painted on the walls. There is a heavy, pale wood door stage left. The room contains a number of standard chairs and their attached desks which are arranged in a loose circle that begins and ends with a large wooden rectangular desk. There are fourteen or so desks in all. There are more desks than students so students can choose where and by whom they sit. A large rectangular desk is located toward the back of the stage; a blackboard hangs behind the desk. The one window in the classroom is located in a partition separating the two "halves" of the stage. I envision this partition at an angle so the audience can see the window. The stage right section will remain dimly lit unless otherwise mentioned. In this section there is a large, low "platform" that is foremost on the stage. Upon it are large, old, beautiful brocade curtains bundled up in piles; in the dark they look like formless blobs. The platform spans almost the entire "front" of this part of the stage. There is another taller box-like platform located toward the back of this section. Other odds and ends, strange things, strange type materials, are spread throughout the room, bricks on the floor, some cloth scraps, piles of books, etc. Anything appropriate for a classroom storeroom.]*

## SCENE 1

*[Stage dark, becoming dimly lit as schools are after they are closed for the day. Sound of "boots" echo on the floor. Everywoman enters stage right in the unused portion of stage, walks onto low platform and stands toward the front of the platform.]*

### EVERYWOMAN:

Good evening, my name is . . . well, you don't really have any business knowing my name. Let's just say I'm symbolic, I'm every woman. And without further ado, the story is "Much Ado-About Nothing." Interesting title, aay? It's loaded. Oh, by the way, I'm assuming you were all told that as a prerequisite to attending this production you had to *read* the play. We're not here — I'm not here —

simply to entertain you folks. There is a participation grade that will go down on *record* along with your credit rating, the points on your license, your — but, I can see from some of your faces that you didn't (read it) so, instead of asking you all to leave so we can have a more intimate post-play discussion, I'll tell you briefly what happens. Pay attention . . . . Once upon a time these men come back from the war. Rich, pretty men. One of these guys, the really pretty one, highly-decorated, brave, courageous, very hot. They call him Claudio. He sees a woman and he *likes* what he sees. Nice goods! A jewel. He wants her. He gets his friend, his buddy Don Pedro, to ask her out for him. Maybe he's afraid of rejection, a little shy with the ladies yet, thinks his friend is more experienced. I don't know. *[Short pause.]* Her father, Leonato, is standing behind her and whispers all the while, "Now, you *know* what you are going to say when this nice young man asks for you" *[in confidence with audience feigned whisper]*. At any rate, she is commanded to say yes. *[Almost closes her eyes — Marilyn Monroe look. Very feminine. She really starts to "act." She mimes all of this. Moves closer and closer to the front of the stage.]* Breathy, dewey, glittering, soft, yes . . . And this guy, the friend, says, "Wait! Uh, I'm not him. I mean, the other fellow, well, I was just doing the talking. See him, over there?" Imagine her embarrassment, mortification, as the pretty one leans slightly forward *[bends slightly forward from the waist]*. Small, inviting smile. Questioning eyes, little wave of the hand. *[Waves a Princess Diana wave.]* She blushes, he says something to break the tension. He laughs. She breathes. And the date is set, the die is cast, their destinies are twined, stars crossed. Now, we all know the lovers have to go through trials and tribulations before they can ride happily into the sunset, right?! Well, this bad brother, *Don John* — the bastard *[afterthought, under breath]*. He is a *nasty* man. One of those truly evil types, archetypal, positively awful, nasty, naughty, creepy at best. *[Getting very worked up.]* He makes me so angry, you know the sort. Any women here? I know you know what I'm talking about. He's the fellow who goes to the army surplus store and buys the pseudo-army decoration with the little naked woman spread-eagled. What is it for — target practice? He buys bumper stickers that say "Life's a bitch and then you marry one." He may frequent the adult bookstore, see pornography as cathartic. Can you imagine? Cathartic? Just good old-fashioned fun, human nature, what men do naturally. He's a classic. I don't understand *why* . . . *[despairingly]*.

*[During the above, Don John, dressed in a black velvet Elizabethan garment, has entered stage left. He stands in a shadow unseen by Everywoman but clearly visible to the audience. Everywoman, realizing that she has lost control, withdraws from the audience wrapping one arm around her body and putting one hand over her mouth. She*

*backs up slowly.]*

*All I'm going to say is . . . uh, [pause] I'm going to leave now [moves to extreme back of platform, trips on back edge, embarrassed motions, leaves quickly stage left. Walks on toes — doesn't want her shoes to make noise now. Stage lights come up dimly on front, stage left, center. Don John stays where he is or perhaps moves center stage. He is contemplative, obviously brooding. Claudio and Don Pedro enter together. Mottled lighting. Some movement to lighting as though there is a slight breeze, tree-shadow-like, but not to a level that would distract audience. As men are talking the woman goes into the window into "unused" portion of stage. The Elizabethan characters here correspond to the roles that will be assigned to the students later in class, i.e. Don Pedro is played by Pete, Claudio by Gayle, and so on. They each have on a distinctive Elizabethan garment (a hat, a jacket, etc.) over, or in addition to, their street clothes. These garments should be used later in the play when the students take on their character roles. Each student ought to have some sort of Elizabethan garment.]*

DON PEDRO:

What's the matter?

DON JOHN:

I came hither to tell you; and, circumstances shortened, for she has been too long a talking of, the lady is disloyal.

CLAUDIO:

Who, Hero?

DON JOHN:

Even she; Leonato's Hero, your Hero. Every man's Hero.

CLAUDIO:

Disloyal?

DON JOHN:

The word is too good to paint out her wickedness; I should say she were worse: think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant: go but with me to-night, you shall see her chamber window entered, even the night before the wedding-day: if you love her then, to-morrow wed her; but it would better fit your honour to change your mind.

CLAUDIO:

May this be so?

DON PEDRO:

I will not think it.

DON JOHN:

If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know: if you follow me. I will show you enough, and when you have seen more, and heard more, proceed accordingly.

CLAUDIO:

If I see anything to-night why I should not marry her to-morrow, in the congregation I shall shame her.

*[Everywoman walks slowly across the stage from stage left to right. Looks toward men. Eyes meet with Don John. He is the only one who sees her. She turns her head away abruptly and goes through window. Don John directs their attention toward the window after she is most of the way through. Men turn, see figure disappearing through window. (Perhaps they just see her heel — not enough to know who she is or anything about her.) All make (exaggerated) horrified gestures and freeze.]*

DON PEDRO:

And as I wooed her for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her.

*[Stage black. Exeunt.]*

## SCENE 2

*[Soft light up on classroom. Bill is sitting in the otherwise empty classroom. He is wearing a brown plaid shirt, brown cords and dark rimmed glasses. He doesn't cross his legs but keeps both feet on the floor. He has a blue backpack in his lap which looks uncomfortable because of the smallness of the desk. He has both hands on the pack toward the top. After looking around a bit he opens his pack and takes out a copy of C.S. Lewis' On Religion. He begins to read and doesn't look up. Enter Pete and Gayle.]*

GAYLE:

Yea. Exactly! *[they have been talking in the hall before they enter the room.]* So she tells me yesterday that she wants to spend more time by-her-self, but she doesn't tell me why. I ask, "Who's the guy?" She says, "No guy," trying to look like she doesn't care, you know. But I know she's been seeing someone for a while because she's always "in the library."

PETE:

Beat, man. I didn't think she was the sort of girl that would do that — at least not without telling you. I thought she was pretty cool — quiet, but cool.

GAYLE:

Well, I'm through with that ----. *[Changing the tone]* Hey Will, Willy, Billy, Bill old boy *[goes over to him, leans down, looks at the cover of his book, pats him hard on the shoulder.]* How's it goin', big guy? *[Immediately ignores him.]*

BILL:

*[Smiles quickly and nervously.]* Oh. *[hesitant pause]* Hi. *[He is hopeful but sees that Gayle is not paying attention to him. Watches the two for a moment and then goes back to "reading." He is very aware of them, however, and looks up periodically to see what they are doing. He has stopped turning pages and every time he looks back at his book he goes to the same place on the page because he is listening to the conversation of the two men.]*

GAYLE:

Yea — so wha'd you think of this play by my man "The Shake?" Did you like it? *[Continues — not waiting for an answer.]* Pretty funny at times. The ending was a little contrived. *[Said slowly, but so you can see that his mind has already moved on to something else. Enter Angela.]* Hi, Angela.

ANGELA:

Hey. How's it goin' guys? *[Sits down, gets out things for class. The two men nod, bob up and down, etc. Enter Mieda.]*

PETE:

Yea. I think Shakespeare did well with this one. I see you liked it. *[directed toward Gayle.]*

ANGELA:

Nice wrap-up there at the end, huh?

PETE:

Oh, Mmhmm. Great.

MIEDA:

I liked it. I liked the ending. I thought it was nice. It was kinda romantic — double wedding and all.

*[Enter Guy and Miguel at more or less same time.]*



ANGELA:

Romantic? I don't know if I would say *romantic*. Hey, Miguel, would you say this play is romantic — better yet — would Mr. Alwaysright say this play is romantic?

MIGUEL:

Hmmm. Well, you know a little bit about how I feel about "*romance*" [*feigned gravity*]. I think flowers are beautiful and all — I even like getting them — but I'm not much on long, drawn out proclamations of love under ivy covered windows. I don't know *how* I feel about marriage. I was the kid — along with all of you [*quick survey of class*] — who said I would never get married. I still feel like I won't, like I don't want to. But I'm starting to appreciate the things I always considered mundane: a good job, a house. This is not to say I've grown less fearful of ending up like my parents. No, double weddings don't appeal to me; *white* weddings really don't appeal to me. I have a hard time being in something I can't easily get out of. I have a hard time with love — or at least saying I'm *in* it. But, speaking of this Wright guy. What do all of you think of him? The dude is seriously strange. He must starch *all* of his clothing, even his suit jackets. He's my nightmare professor. I actually have dreams about his man: scary, epic dreams in which he stands behind an enormous desk for hours — repeating himself — while the clock goes backwards so we can never, ever leave. [*General laughter.*]

MIEDA:

Oh, he's not that bad. He's nice. I think he's kinda cute — in a way. I mean, well maybe not. But he's okay.

Are you kidding? Sometimes I really wonder about his intelligence level. I know that he knows a lot but he's so . . . stilted. I have trouble listening to what he says because of all of his little nervous ticks. I hate it when men wear brown all the time: brown suits, brown ties, brown shirts, everything he owns. And the way he clears his throat and plays with his glasses and his nose and the hair above his ears. [*She imitates his gestures here.*] Blaaah!! [*or any other such noise of disgust. Shivers and shakes.*]

MIGUEL:

Me too. [*Gets up and imitates Professor Wright's stiff carriage. He looks out over his dark shades, which he has pushed down onto his nose.*] Hmmm, oh yes, ahhm. [*Looks up, surveys class, etc.*] Today I thought we would, ahhhh, ah, would analyze the theme of the the, ahmm, Shakespearean "*Hero*." That's page [*pause*], two hundred and twenty-two in your books. Now, what do you think is going on here?

*[All are amused, laughing, etc.]*

MIEDA:

But your clothes need to stick out more. Hold out your jacket like this *[she demonstrates]*.

MIGUEL:

Oh, ahmm, you must, ahmm, excuse my rumpled appearance. I ran out of starch.

ANGELA:

Yes! *[Laughing. All are snickering, etc. except perhaps Bill who is "trying" to read but hasn't turned a page yet.]*

GAYLE:

You're right on that one, Miguel.

GUY:

*[Leaning towards Bill, taps him on the arm.]* Hey man, you read today's assignment? *[Bill nods.]* Was it good? *[Bill nods again.]* Do you think he'll test us on it? *[Bill nods again.]* Shit man, I should never have taken this class. I didn't read this. I can't stand Shakespeare. Puts me right to sleep. Are all you all English majors? *[pause]* Man, I hate this. I need this to graduate otherwise I never would have taken this class. *[Various physical displays of discomfort.]* Shit.

ANGELA:

Hey Gayle, I hear you and Sandy aren't doing too well right now.

GAYLE:

It's over; she's been cheating on me for a while now. And I'm sick of it so I dumped her. Her loss. *[Said with overly smug, almost defensive inflection.]*

ANGELA:

She's seeing someone?

GAYLE:

Yea! You two are friends; she hasn't told you about the mystery man? She won't tell me anything.

ANGELA:

Isn't she doing the senior thesis option? She's a senior right?

GAYLE:

Yea . . . but seniors fool around . . . She's probably hitting on that



big guy in her thesis class.

**MIGUEL:**

Man, you're just being insecure. She's probably spending all of her time making love to books. Can't get it on when you're always worried about your school work anyway.

**PETE:**

I didn't think Sandy would cheat on you — at least not without telling you that she was going to *start* thinking about it and maybe start looking three months after she started thinking about it.

**GAYLE:**

Hmm. I don't know. Maybe I should talk to her . . .

*[Enter Professor Wright from stage left through classroom doorway. Students still continue to murmur as he arranges his things. Looks at his watch and makes a brief survey of the class.]*

**PROFESSOR:**

I thought we would continue our work with *Much Ado About Nothing*. I want us to look at the marriage scene, that's ahmm Act 4, it begins on page 616. *[Pause as students turn pages of book, snickering, etc.]* Now, I thought we would try something a little different. I want everyone to take a part, there are eight. *[Peruses book, looks up and down.]* We'll just read quickly through the scene and then we will ahmm talk about it. *[Pause.]* Who wants to read the part of Leonato? *[Pause, looks around. Bill lifts his hand a little bit.]* Okay. Bill. Anyone else have a preference? *[Looks over glasses at faces. No one reacts.]* All right *[pause as he looks at his book, then at students — during the following statements Professor Wright marks in book with a pencil as he goes along]*, Pete. You read the part of Don Pedro. Gayle, why don't you take Claudio? Angela, how about Beatrice, hmm? Miguel, ahmm you will make a good Benedick. Guy, you read the part of Don John. Mieda, Hero. Bill, Leonato is a small part, why don't you take the part of Friar Francis as well. *[Still marking with pencil in his book. Firmly.]* Now, I want you all to read with feeling. That is the, ahmm, whole function of this exercise. I want you to get a real understanding of what Shakespeare is doing here, how he uses language. Always be aware that this is drama; try and get at least a little sense of your, ahmm, character. I'm sure we are all aware that one class period is not nearly enough time to make the kind of analysis that I would, ahmm, like . . . One thing that I want you to keep in mind is that this particular play is considered a comedy. All right. Now, Bill, you start us off with Friar Francis. Middle of page six hundred and sixteen. *[Pause. Looks over glasses and then down. Bill sear-*

ches page. He's late because he has been watching Professor Wright intently, what he does.]

Start with "You come hither."

BILL:

Oh! ah . . . [pause]

(FRIAR FRANCIS):

You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady.

(Gayle) CLAUDIO:

No.

Bill (LEONATO):

To be married to her; friar, you come to marry her. *[Bill stumbles through this line because he is distracted by Noh's entrance.]* Oh, ah . . .

(FRIAR):

Lady, you come hither to be married to this count.

*[Noh's entrance and subsequent actions happen during the first bit of the reading. Enter Noh. She opens door (which has been closed). Enters, stands facing class with her back to the door. Closes door slowly and quietly so everyone can hear door click. She walks across the room in front of class. Slides seat back and sits down (next to Miguel), arranges things. All her movements must be graceful, calculated, almost beautiful. While students are reading, Miguel greets Noh warmly, non-verbally. She leans toward him, they confer. He turns the pages in her book and points to a place, then goes back to his own book. Angela is watching them, catches Noh's eyes. They greet silently. Noh by raising eyebrows, slight smile and nod. (All this happens quickly.) She immediately starts concentrating intensely on the reading. She does not look at her book but rather is listening very closely to each person in turn and looking at each as they read their parts. All others keep their eyes closely to their books. Prof. looks up and down making small comments when someone does a particularly good job. Very good. Good. Excellent, etc.]*

(Mieda) HERO:

*[Her line is a touch late, or even interrupted.]* I . . . *[looks down]* Oh, I do.

Bill (FRIAR):

If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be

conjoined, I charge you, on your souls, to utter it.

(Gayle) CLAUDIO:

Know *you* any, Hero?

HERO:

None, my lord.

Bill (PRIAR):

Know you any, count? *[Pause]* Oh, . . . ah, . . .

(LEONATO):

I dare make his answer, none.

CLAUDIO:

O, what men dare do! What men dare do! What men daily do! not knowing what they do!

(Miguel) BENEDICK:

How now! interjections? Why, then, some be of laughing, as ah, ha, he! *[Amused. Angela smiles at his amusement. Noh should be seated by now.]*

CLAUDIO:

Stand thee by, friar, Father, by your leave: Will you be with free and unconstrained soul give me this maid, your daughter?

LEONATO:

As freely, son, as God did give her me.

CLAUDIO:

And what have I to give you back, whose worth  
May counterpoise this rich and precious gift?

(Pete) DON PEDRO:

Nothing unless you render her again.

CLAUDIO:

Sweet prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.  
There, Leonato, take her back again:  
Give not this rotten orange to your friend:  
She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.  
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!  
O, what authority and show of truth  
Can *cunning* sin cover itself withall  
Comes not that blood as modest evidence

To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,  
All you that see her, that she were a maid,  
By these exterior shows? But she is none:  
She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.

PROFESSOR:

Good. Good. Ahmm [*Musing.*]

[*Bill is watching Miguel and Noh and fumbles or is late with a line.*]

LEONATO:

What do you mean, my lord?

CLAUDIO:

Not to be married,  
Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton.

LEONATO:

Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof,  
Have vanquished the resistance of her youth,  
And made defeat of her virginity, —

CLAUDIO:

I know what you will say: if I have known her,  
You will say she did embrace me as a husband.  
And so extenuate the forehead sin:  
No Leonato,  
I never tempted her with word too large;  
But, as a brother to his sister, show'd  
Bashful sincerity and comely love.

HERO:

And seem'd I ever otherwise to you?

CLAUDIO:

Out on thee! Seeming! I will write against it.  
You seem to me as Dian with her orb,  
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;  
But you are more intemperate in your blood  
Than Venus, of those pamper'd animals  
That rage in savage sensuality.

HERO:

Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?

LEONATO:

Sweet prince, why speak not you?

DON PEDRO:

What should I speak

I stand dishonor'd, that have gone about

To link my dear friend to a common stale? Uh, stale. *[Said with finality and satisfaction.]*

*[Noh says "Humph" with arms crossed in front of her.]*

PROFESSOR:

Okay. Very good. Very good. That worked out quite, ahmm, nicely. Everyone remember who you are. Beatrice and, oh, and Don John, you'll get yours soon. *[Smiles slightly. Smile drops off face, looks down.]* Now, *[pause]* ahmm, what do you think is going on here?

BILL:

Well, it seems pretty clear to me that Claudio is making it known that he won't put up with Hero's seductive behavior.

ANGELA:

But Hero is about as non-existent as any woman. We don't know anything about her, she hardly says a word. Even before this scene — what does she say? *[Flipping through pages toward the front of the play]* Oh, Benedick, yes he is a pretty man, help me on with my dress? The most seductive thing she says is — Ah, here, *[points to a place in the book]* no, actually, truly, she says very little of interest and certainly nothing to make one wonder about how she would do in bed, or rather what she *has* done in bed.

GUY:

Everything works out in the end. It's all just a joke. I don't see why you're getting so upset. It's a comedy, you know.

GAYLE:

Yea. Good point, Guy. All's well that end well.

ANGELA:

Well, speaking of endings, I don't think it ends well. It *doesn't* end well. According to your logic, if it doesn't end well then it can't all be well, and so it's not — well. Now, what is really going on here? *[Winks at Miguel.]*

MIEDA:

*[Raises hand — Professor indicates for her to speak.]* I agree with

Gayle, though. I mean, I think that everything is okay. She doesn't really die, they get married at the end.

MIGUEL:

Well, I want to know what she was wearing when what's-his-name came to her window that night.

ANGELA:

But he didn't. It's a fiction, Miguel.

MIGUEL:

I know, I know.

PROFESSOR:

Ah, ahmm, excuse me, I think we are getting a little carried away here. Please, let's stick closer to the, ahmm, text. Okay. When you make a point keep in mind what it was *in the play* that would cause you to hold your view on it. Now *[looks over glasses]*, as I mentioned earlier one thing I want you to keep in mind is that this particular play is a comedy.

NOH:

So what are you saying? *[Said slowly, calculated — this is the first thing she has said — obviously — and it is crucial that she sound wound up tight.]* What are you saying? When you say, "This is a comedy," does that mean that we are not supposed to take any of this seriously? *I* believe there is truth in jokes and lies. Humor is used to soften the cutting edge: think of sarcasm . . . We all may aspire to live happily ever after but that doesn't mean we aren't covering up some horrible reality with witty remarks. I think it is interesting that this play *is* considered a comedy. Laughter can be used as a means to humiliate. A few words can destroy a relationship, destroy trust, ruin lives. I think of them as "killing things" because the spoken word, it can't be undone. That things are, or are not, said in jest is of little consequence. Does it help any if I say "I never meant to hurt you? I won't break your bones? I won't stone you? I won't impale you with small, sharp timbers? I will only hurl words and vile twisted truth at you?" I take away your power of autonomy — that's all. Force you to answer my one question one hundred and forty times: the mistaken notion that *man* can do whatever he likes — can create a reality for woman; a false and unrecognizable one. In those moments when Claudio, Don Pedro and her father forsake her (Hero) with words, they make her into a woman beyond her own recognition. She is made inhuman and thus worthy of their castigation? She has to be a thing first; a rotten orange, a ROTTEN ORANGE?



PROFESSOR:

Noh, as I am sure you are, ahmm, aware, there are innumerable interpretations of each work of literature. The critics have been kept busy by Shakespeare for a long, long time. With each passing era a new theory comes into vogue. Maybe we should, ahmm, explore this idea of comedy. When I say it's a comedy I don't mean to suggest that this should be viewed the way we view a late seventies "comic" sitcom. There are some trends in Shakespeare's "comedies" and one of them is that his dramas usually have thoroughly, ahmm, domestic resolutions. Now, this particular play *may not* be as satisfying to you as, say *Midsummer Nights Dream*, which has — built in it — an allowance for the fantastic: the, ahmm, dream. But there are in *this* play similar conventions: Don John's little plot for example. His mischief works to allow the other characters a lack of responsibility for their actions. (Claudio, Don Pedro, even Leonato.) A question we might ask — and you have hit on it here, Noh — is, ahmm, *does* this plot allow them to shirk their responsibility for their actions? This same question comes up in *Midsummer Nights Dream*, and even to some degree in *Twelfth Night*. That, as I am sure you all know, is the sign of a fine, ahmm, work of drama — gets you thinking.

MIGUEL:

[*Aside to Noh.*] Isn't this a little more about you than about the play?  
[*Meaningful look.*]

NOH:

It is about me. It is about all of us. Can you think of yourself as removed? This [*wide, sweeping gesture*], this is not a parenthesis.

BILL:

I really don't understand what you're saying.

GAYLE & PETE:

Me neither. Yeah, what do you mean? Why are you being like this, Noh?

PROFESSOR:

I understand that you are reacting, in part, ahmm, to the text. I do get the feeling, however, that there is more going on for you than what is contained *wholly* in the text. Your emotional response is, ahmm, important, but . . .

NOH:

[*Interrupting him*] I'm angry . . . I'm angry because I feel that what Claudio does to Hero can ultimately be seen as insignificant. The way Shakespeare finishes this play, he's dropping a "nice" handy ending on



a lot of horrible things and everyone is taking it as a resolution — a comic resolution. I can't come to terms with it, Dr. Wright. I am trying to see what you are saying; I do think comedy includes so much of what is hard to take. But Shakespeare makes everyone forget about this scene we just read because everything turns out all right, and all right means that Hero is married off as her cousin — not even as herself — to the man who "ruined" her. It is absurd! Mieda, as Hero, what would you do? Would you want to marry this Claudio? I want to deck him. If I'm Hero — he's all up in my face wanting to see if I'm cute. My father prancing around "Keep her veiled, must keep her veiled, my niece, just like Hero, maybe better, moneyback guarantee you *will* be satisfied. Bought and paid for, bought and paid for."

ANGELA:

Well — that brings up an interesting issue. Why do they get married at all? I see the dramatic need for it as an end. Life goes on — that sort of thing, and, of course, life does go on with all of its good and bad. People marry the wrong "one" all the time. I can't think of how many plays I have read or seen where it has that strange sort of nowhere-land ending. You want a happily-ever-after and you don't get it — you feel like you've just been dropped off of a flat earth. I suppose I could justify *this* ending if I was hard pressed to do it, but something really bothers me about it too. That really doesn't make sense.

NOH:

What did those men see anyway? Do they really know anything? Now, I understand that Don John and his cohorts did a pretty good job at being creeps but if Claudio really is as interested in this "girl" as he would have us believe then he would go to greater lengths to investigate the situation. He would find out. He doesn't though. *[Pause.]* Well, at any rate. What *do* they see? Some silhouette at a window — if that . . . *[Gets up out of chair, starts to walk toward window. Everywoman enters from stage left — not necessarily from the door. She stands just inside classroom; none of the students take note of her.]*

PROFESSOR:

Are you going to, ahmm, start acting things out now? I do think that that is an interesting idea. I do not think, however, that we have, ahmm, time to start some sort of elaborate staging of events in order to figure out theatrical logistics. Perhaps that would be more appropriate in an actual stage setting . . .

NOH:

I want to *know* what those men saw!

PROFESSOR:

*[Everywoman walks across stage, silencing Professor and everyone watches her as she goes into the window just as she did earlier in the Act. The Professor addresses her just as she starts to go through the window.]* Excuse me, young lady. Excuse me! What is going on here? Oh *[pause, looks at watch]*, it must be time for the next session to come in here. I've never had to deal with such rudeness from students as I have this year: interrupting class, walking into a class-in-progress before they even realize it is not their room — or class. Well, this seems like a good place to stop. Remember to prepare the ending scenes of this play for the next class. Perhaps we will try this little reading exercise again. *[He gets his things together and leaves room. The students continue to talk as he leaves; few of them make a move to go. Their movements are perfunctory, half-hearted, preoccupied — they want to stay and talk — with the exception of Guy who looks terribly uncomfortable but doesn't move to go — yet.]*

*[Bill completely unpacks and repacks his bag. His physical carriage, as he performs this task, is that of a person who wants to remain unwatched, invisible. Before unpacking he puts a spiral-bound, green notebook, that he has been writing in during class, on a desk beside him. He forgets this particular notebook as he leaves the room; this should be noticeable to the audience but not played too big.]*

GAYLE:

Well, they didn't know who they saw. That was why John's plan works. They made a grand assumption.

ANGELA:

Exactly!

NOH:

But why doesn't that occur to *them*?

*[Bill walks out after he finishes fiddling with his possessions. Lights down.]*

SCENE 3

MIGUEL:

Hey! What's this?! Hm. "Mr. Bill" forgot his notebook. *[Picks up book and peruses a few pages.]* I wonder what he thought of today's class. *[Turns to back of book.]* Hmm! *[Snickers.]* Aha! Strange stuff. Here, Noh, look at this.

NOH:

I don't even want to try to imagine . . .

ANGELA:

Here, let me see . . . [*As she looks over page*] OH, MY GOD. Now this is wild. [*Squints a bit at the page.*]

GUY:

[*Looking uncomfortable*] Well guys, it's been real . . . I've got a class — catch you all later. [*Leaves never to be seen again.*]

ANGELA:

[*Starts to read out loud slowly.*] "Hero is right to keep silent and 'die' because her seductive behavior brought about the incident in the first place." So his basic premise is that there is a legitimate motivation for what Claudio and friends do? . . .

MIGUEL:

Well, like I said earlier, you "girls" won't like this, but her clothing definitely seems relevant to the case. Don't you agree, guys? Noh?

PETE & GAYLE:

Oh yea . . .

NOH:

Oh, uh huh! P-lease!

ANGELA:

Wait, it gets better. Anybody know what religion this guy was raised? Christian, no doubt, Catholic? He says all this sexual stuff — well, I'm not sure if it's sexual. See, he couches it in such ambiguous language. Here for example, ahhh. "A respectable woman, such as Hero, would not gain anything by refusing to marry Claudio. Even in the present day she would be calling attention to her *now* less than perfect reputation." Her reputation . . . ? "Why would she want anybody to know anyway?" Then he goes on to say, "Hero effectively does herself in with her own 'flirtatious' behavior."

NOH:

Oh, well that's like saying you can't rape the willing.

GAYLE:

That doesn't seem unreasonable to me . . .

[*Angela closes notebook and sets it down absentmindedly on the closest desk.*]

ANGELA:

All right, Gayle, I have a question for you . . . What would you do if a Playboy bunny — a Penthouse centerfold, whatever — if "*she*" were lying in your bed? What would you do? You walk up the stairs in your house, turn on the light, and there she is: reclining, half nude, eyes squinting, cat-like, airbrushed and all . . . what would you do?

GAYLE:

I would fuck her lights out.

NOH:

You — would — *fuck* — her "*lights*" out?!

GAYLE:

You know, I would fuck her brains out?

NOH:

You would *fuck* her *brains* out? Her *brains*?!

GAYLE:

Yea, why are you looking at me like that?

NOH:

Because she's in your bed. She's not a paper doll. She has needs, desires, wants. What if she didn't want you to *screw* her *senseless*?

GAYLE:

Well if she didn't want me to do it to her then what is she there for? But I wouldn't *force* her. C'mon, don't be ridiculous. I wouldn't do that. I'm not like that. What would *you* do in that situation?

NOH:

I would probably ask her who the Hell she was, was she okay? I would *talk* to her.

GAYLE:

Well, I would talk to her too. I mean, of course I would talk to her.

NOH:

Do you understand what I'm saying? You have learned to respond to women like you respond to magazines. You're acting like because she looks good — looks sexy — that she wants you. You are projecting your lust onto her . . . it has nothing at all to do with what might really be going on with her. Think about the implications of the phrase "To fuck someone's brains out." Claudio responds to her that way: he sees her, and he likes the way she looks; he imagines fucking *her*

brains out and proceeds accordingly.

GAYLE:

Okay, right. Yea, I know all that. You're being preachy. Stop patronizing me! You don't have to preach to me, okay? I don't feel good today; I'm really not in the mood for this "inquisition."

NOH:

*[Somewhere in here Noh — or Everywoman — has to spread the tapestries out on the platform.]* All right, maybe I'm being preachy, but you're always tired. You never feel well when I bring up this stuff. I'm telling you, I'm giving you information about my experience As-A-Woman. Isn't that something you want to know anything about?! You men patronize *me* all the time . . . most of them I can't even *tell you* that because then I'm too emotional, or unrealistic, or blowing everything out of proportion, or I'm a bitch, — or I'm cute when I'm angry, or worse! And then, you start telling me I don't have the monopoly on oppression. Poor white man — getting pushed out of jobs because of affirmative action. All the goddamn women and Blacks who don't work at their jobs but can't get fired. But you really don't know anything about what it is like to grow up a minority in this country, or in the world for that matter — to have certain "institutions" divest you of your autonomy! Lie down here. I want to show you something. Humor me. It's the least you can do for a poor little neurotic woman.

BILL:

*[Half runs, half walks into the classroom, looks around — not wildly — but worriedly, breathlessly.]* Has anybody seen a notebook of mine? Oh, here it is . . . *[Noh ignores his entrance. Instead of leaving he stands with book in hand along with rest of students.]*

EVERYWOMAN:

Imagine you are sleeping. You are in bed, dreaming. Landscape scene: blues, greens, pastoral, lovely spring day. Birds are singing — distinctly *[said slowly, with emphasis]*. You take note of this. The birds are singing. Then something vague and shadowy, dreamy happens. Maybe your sister is looking for something — some laundry? Your dog is stretching, came down to check on you, you are determined not to let it wake you. You are dreaming the birds are *singing* loudly and then you hear this sound *[sound of cloth ripping, jarring, unusual, completely out of context]*. Noh is standing near Claudio's head holding a piece of a cotton shirt in each hand. She stays perfectly still while he bolts up on his arms. All the students jump. Some sharp intakes of breath. They are standing mesmerized in the semi-darkness. Everything is suspended in the long, animal stare between Claudio

and Noh. She moves quickly, puts right black gloved hand over Claudio's mouth.]

NOH:

Don't scream. You hear me, don't say anything unless I tell you to.

GAYLE/CLAUDIO:

[Pushes her hand away.] Can't you think of something better? This is like some bad movie — people don't really say things like that.

NOH:

Didn't you hear me? [Noh clamps her hand back over Claudio's mouth, pushes head down a bit. She holds a knife (which might logistically have been concealed in one of the gloves that she has put on while, or before, Everywoman is speaking) over her head, arm straight. She opens it slowly with one hand, obviously a practiced move.] I've got a knife here — feel that cool blade? Now put your head down! Don't say anything or I-will-kill-you!

[Mieda gasps and moves forward — stressed, panicky. She makes a noise — but doesn't say anything.]

MIEDA & PETE:

[Speaking over each other — loud.] Pete: Hey, Noh, what are you doing? Mieda: Don't hurt him. Pete: What — hey, c'mon.

MIGUEL:

[Interrupting Mieda — perhaps holding her arm, "restraining" her and holding his other arm out in front of Pete.] I know her, she won't.

NOH:

[Moves behind him on the platform keeping knife to throat.] Have you ever been fucked? Or, should I say, have you ever known the heat of a luxurious bed? [Shakes him.] Answer me!

GAYLE/CLAUDIO:

[Tentative — a strange edge in his voice.] Yes . . .

NOH:

What's your name?

GAYLE/CLAUDIO:

Gayle. [Same strange edge.]

NOH:

That's a nice name. [Pause.] Spread your legs!



GAYLE/CLAUDIO:

Oh, come on, Noh [*tries to get up and look back at her*]. This is not funny. I don't like this. I don't want us to act this out any more. This can't happen; it isn't real.

BILL/LEONATO:

Do *we* have to be dragged into this?

NOH:

You think you have a choice? Are you being dragged into this? Who will ask your permission to do acts of violence, and who will listen to you when you plead no? *That* is what is so horrible: you are dragged into *this* every day of your life if you look and see how. Nobody will ask you anything! "Please don't do this" doesn't work. My father led me to believe that if I said "Please" and "Thank you" — God! How could someone resist that — not respect that "Please!"? [*Pause. Loud, angry, vicious whisper*] I've got a knife here. You think I'm kidding? I will kill you! You can't get out of this. It's not a dream and it's not the movies. We're in it and "Please" will never, ever work. Now you get up on your knees!

[*Starts to get up on his hands and knees. Noh pushes his head down.*]

GAYLE/CLAUDIO:

Oh, God. What kind of catechizing call you this? [*voice breaking*]

NOH:

To make you answer *truly* to your name! Now shut up! [*suggestive*] I was watching you. Did you know that? I saw you [*pause*], and I had to *have* you. Intemperate bitch! I *know* about you. I can come back here again just like one of your "friends." Confess to all the vile encounters you have had with them a thousand times in secret. You are an animal, common savage, slut, stale, rotten . . . thing!

[*Gayle/Claudio — not saying anything to Noh — not responding at all. He is lying perfectly still. With head on arms, low on platform, still on knees. Noh gets up off the platform and backs up slowly, stands a little way off. Looks at him. Claudio still lying motionless. All the other students are silent and still. Claudio sits up slowly and faces Noh. They stare at each other for a long time.*]

[*Noh moves to another part of the stage? Sits down? Silence for a while.*] How can they do it? How? I can't. Sometimes I want to string him up, cut off his "limbs," his hands, pluck out his eyes, his tongue, divest him of his power. Rape him. Torture him, make him feel like I have. Inflict on him nightmares so paralyzing that he has to turn on all



the lights one by one, and turn on the radio to scare all the monsters out of the corners. I have become obsessed with locking things. [*Unconsciously fingers the skeleton keys that hang around her neck.*] I lock and relock the doors and windows (against imagined, immoral marauders) so many times. He says I know you want it. With those words he justifies the violation: his and every man's. But it's not just me. I see this everywhere. In this play for example, the *fact* that Hero never did anything wrong — that Claudio may ultimately prove innocent of malevolent intention (I'm sure he can justify anything) — does nothing to negate the fact that he almost destroyed her; a fiction of her death was created and *maintained*. Better she be dead . . . Here! Page 618. Wherefore? "Why doth not every earthly thing/ Cry shame upon her? Could she here deny/ The story that is *printed in her blood*? . . . Do not live, Hero; do not ope thine eyes;/ For, did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,/ Thought I thy spirits were stronger than they shame,/ Myself would on the rearward of reproaches/ Strike at thy life . . ." [*Silence but for Pete snickering nervously.*] How can you laugh?

PETE:

Because it's funny . . . I think it's funny. I don't think someone's father would do that.

[*Long pause.*]

NOH:

You're right it is funny, but not because no father would do that, it's "funny" because there are fathers who do that all the time. Not to mention uncles, grandfathers, cousins, brothers, priests . . .

ANGELA:

That's true.

NOH:

It's *funny* that the man who raped *me* could say, with perfect aplomb, "What I really want to do is go down on you, and give you pleasure, but then you would scream." That he could talk about his "big dick" when *I know* that he was lying. Tells me to fix the screen door — he cut it with his knife. Was he *concerned* I might be bitten by mosquitoes? Asks me why didn't I tell him I wasn't on the pill? Why didn't I use the charley bar on my door? Did I want a pimp? [*Long silence.*] Oh God, the horror of finding a man in my room — at all — in *my room*! I actually thought this can't be real. This *cannot* be real. I couldn't accept it; my brain didn't have a response for that sort of thing. I never got a chance to say No, nonononononono. I would feel better if I could have. I think about that a lot. . . . [*looking down*] I kept my legs bent though; the thought of being spread-eagled with my

legs straight makes me feel sick. He didn't notice; I did a lot of subversive things. He was talking about did I know he could throw the knife so well, I better let him get away, did I believe him? He said he would kill me and I said — real snotty-like — "I don't doubt it." Just like that, "I don't doubt it." If he had known me he probably would have speared me through the heart just for being snide *[looks up and around]*. Pretty funny really, when you think about it. *[Noh laughs nervously.]* I thought later how I could have been dead for hours and nobody would have known: my bed soaked red, that tiny mattress completely turned crimson, and me, face down on it. It was Sunday, so it wasn't unusual for me to sleep late. My mother and sister wouldn't maybe have ventured downstairs where my room was until late in the afternoon to see why I was so quiet, or to do laundry. What if he had carted me off? He could have just walked me out my own back door and . . . that might have been even more unexplainable. June first, the year of the 17 year cicadas. I don't suppose I will ever forget that strange humm — that sound located on the horizon and forever advancing. *[Laughs nervously. Mieda is crying silently, i.e., she is making no sound but keeps wiping her eyes. All other students are looking at Noh with various expression of horror and disgust, upset, etc.]*

**BILL:**

But Claudio, I mean Gayle — well, any *man* — wouldn't be vulnerable to the physical reality of rape. So, your play acting only half works here.

**NOH:**

When you say physical reality are you referring to penetration? There are all sorts of orifices in the human body, men have only one less than women do. There are all sorts of *things* that can be forced into holes, besides penises: knives, bottles, broken bottles, animals, guns . . . and many, if not all, of these things can make holes where there aren't any naturally — and violate those. Men are just as vulnerable *biologically* as women are.

**MIGUEL:**

So what are you going to do? What can we do??

**MIEDA, AND ANGELA, AND EVERYWOMAN:**  
KILL CLAUDIO!

*[Stage black.]*

